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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: SINIORA ON UNSCR 1701, RECONSTRUCTION, WAY FORWARD

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (S/NF) In a one-on-one somewhat scratchy meeting with the Ambassador on 8/18, Prime Minister Siniora bristled at the suggestion that he was projecting the wrong image regarding UNSCR 1701. Citing army deployment to the Syrian-Lebanese border as well as southern Lebanon, it is simply not true that he is ignoring Lebanon's obligations, he argued. As for international assistance at the border posts (a topic that appeared to annoy him), he will listen to UN envoys this weekend and the Germans on Monday and make any decisions later. Asked to make his public message regarding UNSCR 1701 more positive, Siniora expressed frustration: the Israelis' military action, he claimed, strengthened Hizballah ("just like they did with Hamas"), which narrows his room for maneuver. Had the USG been willing to help on Shebaa Farms, all would be different. The USG should be grateful, not critical, for what he has accomplished in this imperfect atmosphere. Siniora also cited studies and commitments in rejecting the suggestion that the state seems to have abdicated the reconstruction effort to Hizballah. Lashing back, Siniora said that he had asked the United States at the beginning of the conflict for weapons for the ISF that were never delivered, later for steel trestle/Bailey bridges never delivered, a lifting of the "seige" on the airport and seaports, and nothing happened. While the Ambassador refuted Siniora's points, the PM was more in the mood for unloading than listening. End summary.

HOPING FOR A POSITIVE PICTURE
OF UNSCR 1701 FROM THE PM

2. (S/NF) The Ambassador sat with Siniora (who appeared exhausted) one-on-one for 90 minutes on 8/18, although the meeting was interrupted frequently by phone calls. Saying that he wanted to talk to Siniora unofficially and as a friend, the Ambassador cautioned Siniora that he was projecting the wrong image of UNSCR 1701. This resolution in so many ways is a victory for Lebanon, yet Siniora speaks of it publicly in a begrudging, reluctant fashion that fuels suspicions about the resolution. Moreover, the Lebanese seem to hope to evade their obligations under the resolution, even in the case of unambiguous calls to improve border security -- an issue in Lebanon's interest most of all. Siniora, the Ambassador said, could ease implementation by exercising strong leadership and selling UNSCR 1701 in a positive light. That would give more confidence to the Lebanese and the

international community that things were moving forward in the right way.

REFUTING ALLEGATIONS ON 1701
THAT "NOTHING IS HAPPENING"

13. (S/NF) Tapping his fingers and exhaling loudly as the Ambassador talked, Siniora said that he did not doubt the Ambassador's sincerity or good intentions. But, he said, it is simply false to say that the GOL is ignoring its UNSCR 1701 obligations. "Does no one in your government understand" that the LAF deployment to the south is historic? Siniora also accused the ambassador of ignoring changes made in security at the airport, "and you know very well what has happened there." He also briefed the Ambassador on what he called a "quiet deployment" of LAF soldiers to the Syrian-Lebanese border, done without a cabinet decision in order not to attract attention. After checking numbers by phone with LAF G-2 Commander Georges Khoury, Siniora claimed that 4,000 soldiers have already deployed to the border area, with another 3,000 to go. That is a significant increase over the mere 500 that were there before, he claimed. "We are working, very hard." (Note: We have no independent confirmation of the deployment to the Syrian border. We do not believe Siniora would pass false information to us, but we wonder whether falsely encouraging information might have been passed to him. End note.)

RESISTING AN EXPLICIT REQUEST
FOR UNIFIL DEPLOYMENT AT BORDER

14. (S/NF) When Siniora complained bitterly that the air and sea blockade continues (with some exceptions), the Ambassador

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told Siniora that the PM himself held the power to get them lifted: ask UNIFIL, per para 14 of UNSCR 1701, to help at the airport and seaport and also along the Syrian-Lebanese border. That would give the international community confidence, and the USG would use that to get the blockade removed. The Ambassador noted that the USG had gone out on a limb with the Israelis, insisting on the Beirut-Amman air bridge, even though UNIFIL was not yet helping at the airport. Siniora expressed impatience, saying that Lebanon, as a sovereign country, should be able to come up with its own security solutions. He would listen to what UN envoys Terje Roed-Larsen and Vijay Nambiar tell him, and he will meet with a team of German experts on Monday. He will make no decisions without further consultation, he said, and then pushed again for a full resumption of air service. The Ambassador reminded Siniora that the collective desire not to return to the status quo ante applies to the airport and seaport as well as the south. (Note: The Ambassador saw Larsen late on 8/18. Larsen agreed to push the UNIFIL request to Siniora, too. End note.)

ISRAEL STRENGTHENED HAMAS
AND DID SAME THING WITH HIZBALLAH

15. (S/NF) As for his alleged bad attitude about UNSCR 1701, Siniora said that he to maneuver very carefully because of Hizballah's increased political strength. Israel, he said, "never learns." Israel thought military action would weaken Hamas; whatever military losses Hamas suffered, it more than compensated with political gains. On a smaller scale, the same thing happened with PIJ and PFLP-GC, Siniora argued. Now, the Israelis have deluded themselves again: Israeli military attacks just strengthen groups like Hizballah. Hizballah is now stronger, at the expense of the GOL. In this context, the USG should be grateful at how much Siniora has been able to accomplish, including by getting the resolution accepted unanimously in the cabinet. From a position of extreme weakness, "with my hands tied behind my

back by the Israelis" (presumably another reference to the blockade that seems to preoccupy Siniora -- who often calls to check on fuel and food deliveries), he managed to get the army to the south.

REPEATING ARGUMENTS LINKING
DISARMAMENT TO SHEBAA FARMS

¶6. (S/NF) The Ambassador told Siniora that, had Lebanon been dealing with Hizballah in a serious way, then Israel might never have needed to take military action. But Lebanon failed to exercise responsibility for what took place on Lebanese soil. Interrupting, Siniora said that the United States "took away the tools" he needed to chip away at Hizballah's state-within-a-state status. Repeating familiar arguments, Siniora said that the USG and Israel were being short-sighted in preventing a transfer of Shebaa Farms to international stewardship pending border demarcation. The U.S. position "makes Iran and Syria very, very happy." The Ambassador responded that, if Shebaa Farms were suddenly handed to Lebanon tomorrow, he saw no evidence that the GOL would then be willing to attempt disarmament of Hizballah. Siniora disagreed: "do you think the Sunnis, the Druse, the Christians like having a Shia militia inside Lebanon?" he asked. But one can't build momentum for disarmament when the advocates for that position can be so easily accused of caving to an American-Israeli plot and of abandoning occupied Lebanese land. "I told the Secretary, and I even told the President at the White House," Siniora said, "the key is Sheba'a Farms."

PUSHING FOR GOL COORDINATION
ON RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS

¶7. (S/NF) Shifting to reconstruction efforts, the Ambassador briefed Siniora on a donors' lunch hosted by the DCM for 22 players in the reconstruction field. All had the same complaints about lack of centralized coordination and lack of a GOL articulated vision and priorities. In terms of publicity, the GOL effort was disastrous, the Ambassador said, making it appear as though the state had abdicated all responsibility for reconstruction to Hizballah. The Ambassador urged Siniora to delegate someone immediately who had stature and credibility, who could meet with donors and project initiative on local and international media. The

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Ambassador noted how uncomfortable he felt, working with other USG officials alone to set priorities for our assistance, when we want to use our help to reinforce the state. While there is strong political interest in capitals to help Lebanon, Siniora needs to get a reconstruction strategy and organization launched immediately. We'll get behind him, but only if he moves quickly: otherwise, we'll set our own priorities, and he will have to react.

20 DONORS FOR 20 BRIDGES;
WORRIED ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

¶8. (S/NF) Siniora rejected the suggestion that nothing was happening at the government level. Look, he said, brandishing a list: he had personally found 20 different private-sector donors to rebuild 20 bridges. Soon, he will announce a donor who will rebuild the airport. In the same vein, he was finding people to "adopt" badly damaged southern villages. (Indeed, during this meeting, one of the phone calls Siniora received was from the Emir of Qatar, whom he browbeat into a commitment to rebuild one of the villages.) People who say that they don't see the state at work, Siniora said, "don't know what they're talking about." Moreover, he said, they usually mean that he should "pour money into the Council for the South" -- the fund overseen by Nabih Berri and perceived to be his own patronage slush fund -- "which I

am not going to do." Siniora said that he told the Saudis and Kuwaitis not to transfer the USD 500 million and USD 300 million (respectively) to Lebanon yet, because "I don't want it to end up in Nabih Berri's pocket! We need accountability!"

¶9. (S/NF) Siniora said that he remembered very well the excesses of the rebuilding after the civil war, and he was not going to perpetuate a reconstruction system that led to a huge increase in Lebanon's debt burden. Thus, there are professional engineering studies by the firm Khatib and Alamy underway, and a professional coordinator (Ghassan Taher) starts work on Saturday. Minister of Finance Azour is working on a structure for a fund to which donors can contribute with confidence about the end use. "You all push me on reform -- am I supposed to ignore reform so I can hand out money like Hassan Nasrallah? Is that what you want me to do?" Moreover, Siniora said, "what have you done? At the beginning of this crisis, I asked you for 2,000 rifles for the ISF, mish hayk? Where are they?" (Siniora said that the actual need was for 10,000 rifles -- in line with what ISF Commander Ashraf Rifi has asked us to help with -- but he had "slimmed it down so you could swallow the request.") As the conflict was winding down, "I asked you for temporary steel bridges. How many did you deliver?" And he took the opportunity again to raise the air and sea blockade.

¶10. (S/NF) Refuting the idea that the USG has been nonresponsive, the Ambassador reminded Siniora of what the USG has done, including its commitment of USD 50 million in emergency humanitarian and relief assistance and the extra coordination work -- done directly in response to requests from the PM -- on fuel deliveries. (The Ambassador did not mention wheat, being unsure of the status of the request to USDA and of the potential delivery date.) The Ambassador noted that, when Washington asks what are the GOL priorities for U.S. funding on reconstruction, "I don't know what to tell them." If Washington wants to pay for a high-profile bridge reconstruction such as the one on the Damascus-Beirut highway, we do not know whom to ask whether another donor is already lined up. Claiming that the Italians will build that particular bridge, Siniora sighed, "what do you want me to do?" The Ambassador told him to have his new donor coordinator call in all major donors at the beginning of the week to explain the GOL strategy and priorities -- and to move quickly, before Nasrallah has used cash hand-outs to take over the country. "O.k," Siniora said, "we'll do it." In closing the meeting, Siniora's tone turned apologetic: "I know all of you are working very hard," he said. "So am I."

COMMENT

¶11. (S/NF) Siniora, who probably hasn't had a full night's sleep since July 11, was grouchy. No one can accuse him of being lazy on the job, and lining up 20 private-sector donors for 20 key bridges frees up that much public money (from either the GOL or donors) for other projects. But Siniora's micromanaging style works better when one has sensitive

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negotiations regarding a potential Security Council resolution than it does when one needs to design and implement a reconstruction program quickly. Siniora does not have the time to spend with individual donors on priorities, yet those donors have the need to understand GOL thinking. We are seeing Minister of Finance Azour -- close to Siniora -- on Monday to see how best to jumpstart a GOL reconstruction coordination effort.
FELTMAN